

'83 Plot Targeted Murrah Federal Building/Supremacists' Bombing Plans Recalled

Houston Chronicle (TX)

May 20, 1995 | JO THOMAS, RONALD SMOTHERS | Page: 13

Twelve years before the federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed, a group of white supremacists with close ties to the neo-Nazi group Aryan Nations drew up a plan to bomb the same building in much the same way, according to evidence gathered by a federal prosecutor

The plot, conceived at the end of October 1983, called for parking a van or a trailer in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building and blowing it up with rockets detonated by a timer, the prosecutor, Steven Snyder, recalled in an interview. He called himself a prisoner of war and had been convicted of two murders.

Although no evidence links Snell to last month's bombing or to either of the suspects now charged with it, his impending execution had been protested by right-wing paramilitary groups, which called him a patriot and termed the federal government "the Beast."

Timothy McVeigh, the prime suspect in the Oklahoma City blast, has never mentioned Snell, and federal officials who investigated Snell on other charges said they considered it "unlikely" that he or his supporters had been involved.

Snyder -- who had uncovered evidence of the 1983 plot, including Snell's role in it, while preparing for trial in a sedition case against a group of white supremacists -- declined to say whether he had brought the similarities between the 1983 plans and the bombing last month to the attention of investigators in Oklahoma City.

Although the existence of an earlier plot does not itself demonstrate any links between those identified as plotters then and those accused now, it does suggest that the idea of bombing this particular federal building could have been a subject of discussion among small extremist groups for more than a decade.

The only links between McVeigh and people identified as the earlier conspirators are extremely tenuous. McVeigh once got a traffic ticket in the Fort Smith, Ark., area, where some of them lived, and several months ago his sister Jennifer subscribed to The Patriot Report, a newsletter published there.

The details of the 1983 plan came from James Ellison, the founder of the Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord, an anti-Semitic paramilitary group that now appears to be defunct but once flourished in northern Arkansas.

Ellison's account first came to light when Snyder, an assistant U.S. attorney in Fort Smith, interviewed him in preparation for his role as the principal prosecution witness against 14 other white supremacists, including 10 charged with plotting to overthrow the government by force. The trial was held in 1988, and all the defendants were acquitted.

In addition to Snell, who was already on death row, the defendants included Richard Girnt Butler, chief of the Aryan Nations, a neo-Nazi umbrella organization for white supremacist groups; Robert Miles, a former Ku Klux Klansman who headed the Mountain Church of Jesus Christ the Saviour in Cohoctah, Mich., and Louis Beam Jr., former grand dragon of the Texas Ku Klux Klan and "ambassador at large" of the Aryan Nations.

According to notes Snyder took before the trial, Ellison said he attended a meeting of extremist groups in Hayden Lake, Ohio, in July 1983 and told them of the death of Gordon Kahl, a member of the right-wing Posse Comitatus.

Kahl was a tax protester who fled North Dakota in early 1983 after a shoot-out with federal agents and was subsequently killed in a gunbattle with agents in Smithville, Ark